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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the English-language performance of bilingual children so that patterns of difficulty may be ascertained and intelligent decisions can be made in designing language training for these students. The document first provides a review of relevant literature defining bilingualism, inherent characteristics of bilingualism, academic and psychological problems created by bilingualism, and essentials of language proficiency, and discusses specific patterns of difficulty to be expected in English-language performance. The author then describes an experiment conducted among 15 bilingual and 15 monolingual children to determine patterns of difficulty. The details and results are reported along with a discussion of implications. Findings confirm the investigations and statements of linguists as to areas of difficulty for bilingual speakers; however, the similarity of performance by their monolingual English-speaking peers indicates that other dynamics influence the language development of children in both groups. These factors must also be investigated. (Author/VM)

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PATTERNS OF DIFFICULTY IN ENGLISH IN BILINGUAL MEXICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN

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THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM . . .	1
II	METHOD	10
III	RESULTS	13
	Patterns of Difficulty	14
	Types of Nonstandard Forms	16
IV	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	20
V	SUMMARY	23
REFERENCES	. . . . .	25
APPENDICES	. . . . .	28
	A. Age, grade, Michigan Test raw score, Grammatic Closure raw score, and Language Age for the bilingual group	29
	B. Age, grade, Michigan Test raw score, Grammatic Closure raw score, and Language Age for the monolingual group	30

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
1.	Structures on which more than half of the children in each group used nonstandard forms	15

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Oral recitation, comprehension, reading, and writing are the core of the academic curriculum and are all predicated on a proficiency in the English language. Classroom teachers, reading teachers, and special services personnel in the North Sacramento School District are well aware that a number of bilingual Mexican-American children in their classes have problems that manifest themselves in a failure to grasp a basically standard English curriculum. Special programs in bilingual education in which kindergarten and first grade children are taught material in both Spanish and English are excellent efforts to meet this problem. Armando Ayala (1971), Coordinator of the Area III Valley Intercultural Program, explains that this is not a remedial program but a developmental one in which all degrees of bilingualism are represented. One component of the program is English as a second language, and the other is Spanish as a second language. Eventually, however, the bilingual children must function as capably in English in upper grade material as their monolingual English speaking peers.

Teachers in regular programs are generally able to sense the language deficit, but they need to know the specific nature of the difficulty the bilingual child may have. The purpose of this study is to examine the English-language performance of bilingual children so that patterns of difficulty may be ascertained. Intelligent decisions can then be made

to alter the language training for these students, whether they be in a regular monolingual program or a bilingual program. Another purpose of this study is to compare the performance of bilingual children with that of monolingual English-speaking children.

Children's bilingual behavior has a number of consequences which must be taken into consideration, for we know that no language behavior occurs in a vacuum. Therefore, the review of literature will take the following aspects of bilingualism into account: a definition of bilingualism and inherent characteristics of bilingualism, the academic and psychological problems created by bilingualism, the essentials of language proficiency, and the specific patterns of difficulty to be expected in English-language performance.

Definition of Bilingualism and Inherent Characteristics

The only valid definition of bilingualism according to Roeming (1971) is that it is the total behavioral functioning of an individual in at least two interchangeable languages. Marckwardt (1965) defines English, as a foreign language, as the English taught as a school subject or on an adult level solely for the purpose of giving the student a foreign-language competence. English as a second language is defined as English used as a language of instruction in the schools, or a lingua franca between speakers of widely diverse languages, as in India.

A discussion by Prator (1969) points out that any significant difference between the acquisition of one's mother tongue and adding a second language is that the former is merely learned, whereas the latter must usually be taught. Prator contends that though the difference is not absolute, it still has enormous consequences. Of most interest to linguists is the difference that arises from linguistic interference, which affects every element of teaching a second language. Whereas the child acquires his first language without prejudice or predisposition toward certain forms of language, when he comes to his second language, he must do so against the ingrained and often misleading influence of his mother tongue. Green (1969) infers from his findings that possibly at an early age the bilingual child does not regard his languages as separate entities, but uses them as alternatives to one another, depending on circumstance:

> This possibility also implies that the argument that separate languages are variations on a basic theme is a correct one. The variations are modes of comprehending and uttering the one central linguistic pattern we are biologically destined to develop. Only as bilingual children begin to mature and to develop more abstract modes of thought do they probably become more sharply aware of just how languages compare and contrast as structures. (p. 195)

Academic and Psychological Problems

Ayala (1970) cites the Department of Health Education and Welfare, Office of Education Report of 1968:

> There is plentiful evidence linking native bilingualism with retardation and underachievement in schools. Investigators have claimed that early childhood bilingualism is a handicap, has detrimental effects on intelligence, contributes to mental confusion and language deficiency, and that it leads to retardation in school. Recent studies however show that the handicap results from the way schools and communities have dealt with children who speak another language and not from the children's bilingualism. (p. 2)

Attempts to use English or to become Anglicized are criticized by peers and result in a state of anomie, which Lambert (1963) describes as a feeling of not comfortably belonging in one social group or the other. Stanfield (1970) observes that students who have identified with Anglo culture and rejected the Mexican-American culture experience parental conflict, alienation, health problems, guilt, and anxiety. Ott (1967) finds that many of the youngsters from a non-English background are victims of economic poverty and products of illiteracy.

By far the largest single cause of academic failure is the language barrier. Bilingual education aims to correct the semifluency and ineffective communication that too often result from a child's limited functioning in both languages (John, 1968).

Spence, Mishra, and Ghozeil (1971) cite test biases in the research done in the United States about the intellectual effects of language variations. They claim that these test

biases show a high relation between monolingual use of English and superior intellectual ability as measured by standardized tests. Their research, in which they are careful to account for socioeconomic factors, shows that Mexican-American children who are instructed in English as well as in Spanish at home seem to have some measurable, significant intellectual advantages over children who are instructed at home in Spanish only. Nevertheless, the study concludes:

> Both groups were disadvantaged in their knowledge of English word meaning, in their listening ability in English, and in their ability to match English words and concepts. They were also equally disadvantaged in their use of the alphabet, in their ability to copy, and their knowledge of numbers. (p. 313)

Essentials in Language Proficiency

Carroll (1965) prefers that language be evaluated in its spoken form as it is primarily a vocal phenomenon. He says that an analysis of proficiency should include auditory comprehension and oral production of phonemes, morphemes, syntax, and lexicon, although it can be argued that mastery of structure is more essential than a mastery of the lexicon.

Further review of the literature reveals much emphasis on structure. Referring to Chomsky, Carroll (1971) proposes that language teachers should evaluate grammatical theories in terms of the degree to which they conform to the linguistic habits that actually enable a language user to speak and

understand the language. In the terms proposed by Chomsky, this would have to include both a theory of competence and a theory of performance. Carroll takes issue with Chomsky, however, by adding that the evidence that transformational rules correspond to any habits that are actually involved in the behavior of speakers and hearers is, thus far, meager and highly controversial.

Campbell (1970) and Ritchie (1970) hold the view that the grammar of a new language is fundamental to the development of competence in that language. Ritchie also calls attention to Chomsky's general theory of linguistic structure, which specifies that syntactic information about a sentence is a necessary prerequisite to the full specification of semantic and phonological information about it.

Lado (1970) disagrees with the emphasis that many other linguists place on structure. H. contends that the speaker selects both structural and lexical items simultaneously in verbal formulation. He adds that this in no way detracts from the elegance and compactness of transformational grammar rules as a way of talking about a language.

Developments in grammatical theory have clarified the distinction between deep and surface structures and have important implications for the language teacher. Wardaugh (1967) points to the need for translating these analyses into better contrastive studies. Productivity can be clearly related to a theory of language maintaining that a grammar

consists of a finite set of rules used to produce an infinite set of sentences.

Paul Smith (1969, p. 531) reacts to the trend in linguistics that emphasizes structure as the essential quality of a language with the argument that this will teach an abundance of framework but a paucity of content. He colorfully elaborates that a skeleton without flesh is not a person; a scaffold without walls is not a house; and a structure without a vocabulary is not a language.

Jorstad (1971), in the Valley View School study, selected the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities to evalute the proficiency of bilinguals who have learning disabilities. While the norms of this test are not standardized for bilinguals, Jorstad, in this instance, sought information for differential diagnoses and guides to prescriptive patterning of instruction.

The Bilingual Oral Language Program administered by the Department of Education in Lansing, Michigan, described by Benjamin (1969), is a program in which new structural patterns are introduced in situations calling for meaningful communication. Within a grammatically controlled framework, new vocabulary is carefully introduced to facilitate the social and cognitive goals of the program. The Michigan Oral Language Productive Test (n.d.), which is basically a structural test, is an outgrowth of this program.

Patterns of Difficulty

The principle of introducing material aurally-orally is stressed in an examination of likely areas of difficulty in English as a second language. The full range of differences between Spanish and English is provided in a contrastive analysis in a publication by the Commonwealth Office of Education (1965). This contrastive analysis includes vowels, diphthongs, consonants, grammar and structure, pluralization of nouns, personal pronouns, adjectives and pronouns, articles, verbs and their tenses, use of auxiliaries, negative forms, the position of adverbs and adverbial phrases, and sentence rhythm.

Michael West (1965) asks us not to overlook the aspect of forgetting, for he feels that language learning is not so much a matter of remembering as a matter of not forgetting. He suggests that language learning is like trying to fill a bucket with a hole in it.

Various linguists and educators describe further specific areas of difficulty. Fries (1965), for example, outlines the many appearances and forms of the verb have, since it causes so much concern to the learner of English as a second language. Paterno (1965) identifies English modification structures as troublesome. King (1965) emphasizes the need to internalize patterns with sufficient practice so that they become habit, especially syntactic constructions, inflected words, plural endings, past tense forms of verbs,

and appropriate pronoun case. Gunter (1965) gives special stress to transformational rules that the learner must apply so that he may generate whole batteries of sentences. The student, for example, must be able to transform statements into questions.

Additional interference points for the Spanish speaker that Dennis (n.d.) cites include the lack of the unaccented syllable, irregular plurals, use of comparative adjectives, subject and object pronoun confusion, and word order. Prator (1969) discusses reflexives as a problem noting that, while Spanish has reflexive pronouns, English is much more complicated, utilizing 10 irregularly formed reflexives. Another conflict point for the learner is the use of the present-perfect tense (Pattison, 1969). Long (1969) cites the problem of learning the uses of do and like and their function in negation.

Jorstad (1971) reports additional evidence that syntactic difficulty is paramount for bilinguals. The Grammatic Closure Subtest of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (ITPA) produced the lowest scores of all the subtests. The scores of the children, who were having severe reading difficulties, were much lower than the test norms, indicating that grammatic ability was the area of greatest deficit.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 15 bilingual and 15 monolingual children selected from first and second grade classes at the Northwood School. Identified educable mentally retarded or educationally handicapped youngsters were not included. There was no evidence of hearing loss according to school records.

The designation of bilingual speaker was determined by the teacher's knowledge that Spanish was the language spoken in the home. This knowledge was based on school registration forms, parent conference experiences, and by checking with Spanish-speaking school aides familiar with the families. Monolingual English-speaking children were selected on the basis of similar information.

Environmental variables influencing Spanish and English usage, such as how long the family has resided in the United States, or how powerful the sanctions are against using English in the home, or which language is dominant in the home, or in which language the child has greater proficiency, were not taken into account. The focus of this exploratory study is an examination of existing language behavior of the child as he is seen in the school.

Ages of the two groups of children were equivalent. The

mean age of the bilingual children was 7-8 years (S.D. = 8.89 months) and ranged from 6-2 to 8-11 years. The mean age of the monolingual group was 7-6 years (S.D. = 7.62 months) and ranged from 6-7 years to 8-8 years. A comparison of mean ages produced a t ratio of .61 (df = 28) which is not significant at the .05 level.

The Northwood School children are from a low socioeconomic population as evidenced by the fact that Northwood is a Title I target school. Criteria for Title I status include high prevalence of Aid to Families with Dependent Children, number of free lunches, and low achievement-test scores.

Language Tests

Two tests were used to assess patterns of difficulty in structure and syntax: the Grammatic Closure Subtest of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (Kirk, McCarthy and Kirk, 1968) and the Michigan Oral Language Productive Test (n.d.) which was developed contingently with the Michigan Oral Language Program (see Benjamin, 1969) and is presently being field tested to establish norms. Scoring procedures for the Grammatic Closure Subtest provide a raw score, a scaled score, and a language age for the subtest. Its norms are not standardized for bilingual children or for children from low socioeconomic groups. Scoring procedures for the Michigan

Oral Language Productive Test differ in that this test categorizes responses as to the kind of nonstandard forms the child is using.

Procedure

Children in the school were acquainted with the examiner who is the school speech therapist and is often seen in and out of classrooms as a familiar person. They are therefore accustomed to the speech therapist frequently taking children out of the room.

Each child was tested individually. Half the children were given the Grammatic Closure Subtest first; half were given the Michigan Test first. The children were tested in a small room away from the regular classroom, relatively free from interruption. Recess bells and normal school noises occasionally interrupted our proceedings. In a few instances some important school activity prevented a youngster from completing both tests in one session.

Each child's performance was evaluated in terms of total score, language age, and patterns of difficulty in his usage of standard forms.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

A comparison of the performance of the 15 bilingual children and the 15 monolingual on the Michigan Oral Language Productive Test revealed similar achievement in the two groups. The mean score of the bilingual group was 25.00 correct responses (S.D. = 5.39), and the mean score of the monolingual group was 29.13 (S.D. = 6.83). A comparison of means produced a t ratio of 1.77 (df = 28), which is not significant at the .05 level of significance.

The Language Age of the two groups as measured by the Grammatic Closure Subtest of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities did not differ significantly, though the monolingual group was significantly more variable than the bilingual group. The mean Language Age for the bilingual group was 6-0 years (S.D. = 9.07 months) and the mean Language Age of the monolingual group was 6-8 years (S.D. = 20.73 months). Using Edwards' (1968, pp. 102-103) adjustment for unequal variances, the t ratio for the difference between means was 1.27 (df = 28), while the t' was 2.145, thus the null hypothesis is retained. The F ratio for the variances was 5.22 (df = 14/14; $p < .05$).

A high correlation exists between the two measures of language used. The correlation is sufficiently strong for individual prediction from test to test. The Spearman rank

correlation between Grammatic Closure and the Michigan Test was .97 for the bilingual group and .98 for the monolingual group.

Patterns of Difficulty

A task analysis using the model of the scoring procedures of the Michigan Test was performed on the verbal responses of the children to both tests. Specifically, responses for both tests were sorted according to their language category and tallied according to specific tasks within that category. Categories included uses of be, comparisons, uses of do, double negative, uses of have, past tense, past participle, plurals (regular and irregular), possessives, subject-verb agreement, agentives, reflexive pronouns, and prepositions. The number of errors made by the children from each group was compared for each item to determine whether the groups differed. Specific types of nonstandard errors were outlined.

The between-group difference was significant in only one of the 13 structures tested. In the language category of comparisons, 11 children in the bilingual group and 3 children in the monolingual group made errors in the use of most (Item 14, Michigan Test). Results of the Fisher Exact Probability Test showed a probability of less than .01, using tabled values.

Some of the structures posed substantial difficulty for both groups (see Table 1), even though the groups did

Table 1. Structures on which more than half of the children in each group used nonstandard forms.

Item	Category and Task	Number of Children Making Errors: Bilingual Group (N=15)	Monolingual Group (N=15)
	Double Negative		
30*	any	8	9
41*	any	9	8
14**	any	11	7
	Past Participle		
5*	gone	15	12
9*	made	12	11
28*	seen	11	8
13**	eaten	13	13
26**	hung	15	13
	Past Tense		
27**	stole	11	13
	Irregular Plurals		
17**	men	9	9
19**	soap	14	14
23**	sheep	12	10
28**	women	13	13
31**	children	13	10
32**	mice	13	10
	Reflexive Pronouns		
29**	himself	10	10
33**	themselves	15	14
	Prepositional Phrase		
11**	at night	13	12

* Michigan Oral Language Productive Test
** Grammatic Closure Subtest of Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities

not differ on the other structures. The criterion for subject difficulty was more than half of each group making errors on the structures. Patterns of difficulty common to both groups are in the following language areas in which children used nonstandard forms: use of double negative, past participle, past tense, irregular plurals, reflexive pronouns, and prepositional phrases.

Types of Nonstandard Forms

The kinds of frequently occurring nonstandard forms are of interest. Certain categories elicited more of a variety of nonstandard types than others, specifically, past participle, past tense, and double negative.

Both tests utilize a method in which the stimulus question is structured so that the child will give a verbal response. Part of the stimulus sentences are provided in the following examples to illustrate the children's use of nonstandard forms.

Category

Past Participle (Michigan Test, Item 5)

Task		Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
Have you always	(gone)	went	2	4
		go	12	8
		going	1	0
		Total	15	12

Category

Past Participle (Michigan Test, Item 9)

Task	Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
Have you always ___(made)___	make	11	11
	makt	1	0
	Total	12	11

Category

Past Participle (Michigan Test, Item 28)

Task	Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
Have you always ___(seen)___	saw	4	1
	see	5	7
	sees	1	0
	seed	1	0
	Total	11	8

Category

Past Participle (Grammatic Closure, Item 13)

Task	Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
All the cookies have been ___(eaten)___	gone	9	4
	ate up	1	2
	aten	2	6
	eat	1	0
	eated	0	1
	Total	13	13

Category

Past Tense (Grammatic Closure, Item 27)

Task	Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
These are the jewels he ___(stole)___	steal	1	0
	stoled	3	11
	stoling	1	0
	stealed	2	2
	stolded	1	0

Past Tense, continued

Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
had	1	0
took	2	0
Total	11	13

Category

Past Participle (Grammatic Closure, Item 26)

Task: Now the picture has been ___(hung)___

Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
hanged	9	12
hang	1	0
hanging	2	0
hangded	1	1
fixed	1	0
put up	1	0
Total	15	13

Category

Double Negative (Grammatic Closure, Item 14)

Task: But there weren't ___(any)___

Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
no more	4	6
none	6	0
no cookies	0	1
here	1	0
Total	11	7

Category

Double Negative (Michigan Test, Item 30)

Task: There aren't ___(any)___

Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
no birds	7	9
none	1	0
Total	8	9

Category

Reflexive Pronouns (Grammatic Closure, Item 29)

Task	Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
He kept one for __(himself)__	him	9	4
	hisself	1	6
	Total	10	10

Category

Reflexive Pronouns (Grammatic Closure, Item 33)

Task	Response	Bilingual	Monolingual
They all hurt (themselves)	theirself	7	9
	theirselves	4	0
	him	1	0
	themself	2	0
	their all selves	1	0
	theirselfs	0	4
	they all selves	0	1
	Total	15	14

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

These findings confirm the investigations and statements of the linguists as to areas of difficulty for bilingual speakers. Nevertheless, the similarity of performance by their monolingual English speaking peers indicates that other dynamics influence the language development of children in both groups. Herein are implications for further research. Developmental factors may be operant and warrant continued investigation. The environmental variables cited earlier that may influence Spanish or English usage need examination.

More important for consideration is the factor of low socioeconomic status and its implications for cultural and nonstandard language differences. Adler (1971) holds the view that to describe nonstandard language patterns as deficient or deprived just because they are the languages of lower social class children is to attach value-laden terms that imply social superiority or inferiority and furthermore do not necessarily enable us to teach the child. Stimulus environments for language may be different, but not necessarily superior. Implications for research are that investigators need to take these factors into account especially with regard to the instruments we use to assess language proficiency. Adler points out that current instruments are

based on middle class norms and do not account for ethnic differences as well. Differences are not pathologies and language intervention programs should therefore be designed to both teach and treat the language-impaired and the language-different child.

A follow up inquiry about the children who scored two to three years behind their peers in language age, and who are still in the school, disclosed that these children (three in each group) are having academic difficulties according to their teachers. This confirms the Jorstad (1971) study findings in which children with severe reading problems scored lowest on grammatic closure and far below national norms.

These data also show that 13 out of 15 children in the bilingual group are one or more years behind in language age, applying the norms of the test. This fact is also true for eight out of the 15 children in the monolingual group. Developmental and remedial oral language programming with specific objectives for building grammatic and syntactic skills is clearly necessary for individual children who may be either bilingual or monolingual and who are in regular programs. Language intervention programs for children who are demonstrating difficulty, such as these described, need to include an assessment of vocabulary and auditory skills in addition to the grammatic and syntactic elements.

A further implication for research would be an

examination of bilingual children's performances on both Spanish and English proficiency tests to ascertain the primary language strength of the individual child. This information would be useful in programming the bilingual child.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The grammatic and syntactic language skills of 15 bilingual and 15 monolingual English-speaking children were assessed to determine language proficiency and patterns of difficulty.

The mean age of the bilingual group was 7-8 years (S.D. = 8.89 months) and the mean age of the monolingual group was 7-6 years (S.D. = 7.62 months).

Two tests were used: the Grammatic Closure Subtest of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, which provides a Language Age, and the Michigan Oral Language Productive Test, which categorizes error patterns. The groups did not differ significantly from each other on either of the tests used.

Results showed the mean Language Age of the bilingual group to be 6-0 years (S.D. = 9.07 months) and the mean Language Age of the monolingual group was 6-8 years (S.D. = 20.73 months). The mean score of the bilingual group on the Michigan Test was 25.00 correct responses (S.D. = 5.39) while the mean score of the monolingual group was 29.13 (S.D. = 6.83).

A correlation that is sufficiently strong for individual prediction from test to test exists between the two measures of language used. The Spearman rank correlation between

Grammatic Closure and the Michigan Test was .97 for the bilingual group and .98 for the monolingual group.

Differences and similarities in the error patterns are outlined in a task analysis of test items. The Fisher Exact Probability Test showed the between-group difference to be significant in only one of the 13 structures tested. Non-standard errors in areas of greatest subject difficulty are outlined and described.

Implications for further research are discussed in the context of the results.

The study has demonstrated in this instance, that just because children are bilingual, they do not necessarily have greater language deficits than their monolingual peers. It is important, therefore, that the language performance of any child having difficulty be evaluated and programmed according to his needs and abilities whether he be bilingual or monolingual.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Grade, age, Michigan Test raw score, Grammatic Closure raw score, and Language Age for bilingual group.

Subject	Age In Months	Grade	Michigan Raw Score	Grammatic Closure Raw Score	Language Age
1	84	1	22	14	5-6
2	101	2	29	22	7-3
3	95	2	19	13	5-4
4	90	1	27	17	6-0
5	95	1	25	15	5-8
6	85	1	26	17	6-0
7	87	1	15	14	5-6
8	105	2	29	17	6-0
9	93	2	30	20	6-8
10	95	2	30	22	7-3
11	74	1	31	17	6-0
12	89	2	17	9	4-8
13	107	2	17	11	5-0
14	78	1	27	19	6-5
15	96	2	31	21	7-0

Appendix B. Grade, age, Michigan Test raw score, Grammatic Closure raw score, and Language Age for monolingual group.

Subject	Age In Months	Grade	Michigan Raw Score	Grammatic Closure Raw Score	Language Age
1	88	1	26	22	7-3
2	94	2	32	23	7-7
3	100	2	35	19	6-5
4	81	1	16	9	4-8
5	87	1	17	9	4-8
6	79	1	35	21	7-0
7	91	2	29	24	7-11
8	98	2	36	28	9-2
9	92	2	37	31	10-4
10	97	1	29	19	6-5
11	104	2	35	21	7-0
12	94	2	18	8	4-5
13	79	1	29	9	4-8
14	80	1	29	11	5-0
15	81	1	34	22	7-3